

Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (Boston: Shambala, 1996, revised edition; first edition seems to be 1970, so by now she's read Bettelheim)

Some may find this text a little meandering and obtuse. You get a more effective demonstration of the method of Jungian analysis and motif amplification in the web page I posted to the Materials Section of the Website, from the Jungian Psychoanalysis Website, where you see a much clearer writer describe how such an analysis—which typically converts the characters and incidents of the tale into a psychodynamic drama—would proceed in relation to the tale of the twelve princesses who danced their shoes to pieces every night.

The essence of the argument is found in the Preface, and Chapters One to Six. But the text is not very self-explanatory: it appeals frequently to basic Jungian concepts without explaining them, and so Calvin Hall, the essays in *Man and his Symbols* and online material should be consulted to establish the basis of the Jungian psychology, and the key points at which it differed from Freud—such as the personal vs. the Collective Unconscious, and Jung's insistence that he offered an account of the normal rather than the neurotic personality.

Preface: This is solidly Jungian: (Chapter One, begins with a solemn declaration that Fairy Tales wire directly into the Collective Unconscious and therefore are psychic evidence of the very first order. This is merely asserted: there is no examination of *how* they do this or *why* they should be able to grant so uniquely privileged access. She has a censorious, dry, school-ma'am-ly tone: she aims to correct and discipline her colleagues: "From the Jungian school, so many books have been published that I cannot name them all here. Although it is not my intention to assail colleagues by name, I would nevertheless like to express a very personal opinion here. In many Jungian attempts at interpretation, one can see a regression to a very personalistic approach. The interpreters judge the hero or heroine to be a normal human ego and his misfortunes to be an image of his neurosis. Because it is natural for a person listening to a fairy tale to identify with the main character, this kind of interpretation is understandable. But such interpreters ignore what Max Luthi found to be essential for magical fairy tales, namely, that in contrast to the heroes of adventurous sagas, the heroes or heroines of fairy tales are abstractions—that is, in our language, archetypes. Therefore, their fates are not neurotic complications, [and hence to be treated from what is essentially a Freudian standpoint] but rather are expressions of the difficulties and dangers given to us by nature. In a personalistic interpretation, the very healing element of an archetypal narrative is nullified." Pp.vii-viii. The way the reasoning unfolds may not carry conviction to all: "For example, the hero-child is nearly always abandoned in fairy tales. If one then interprets his fate as the neurosis of an abandoned child, one ascribes it to the neurotic family novel of our time. If, however, one leaves it embedded within its archetypal context, then it takes on a much deeper meaning, namely that the new God of our time is always to be found in the ignored and deeply unconscious corner of the psyche (the birth of Christ in a stable). If an individual has got to suffer a neurosis as a result of being an abandoned child, he or she is called upon to turn towards the abandoned God, within but not to identify with his suffering." P.viii "...depth-psychology interpreters...transfer their own subjective problems onto the fairy tales, where they are not to be found at all. As in all scientific

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work, the subjective factor can never be entirely excluded. But I believe that by using the basic tool of mythological amplification, one can hold in check such subjectivism and, to some extent, thereby reach a generally valid interpretation.” P.viii [Would it be wildly wrong to view this as an example of the cloak of “science” being flung over all manner of craziness?]

“In what follows, my efforts are aimed at interpreting only a few classical stories, or basic types of important fairy tale plots, as it were, in order to help clarify for the reader the Jungian method of interpretation...” p.ix

Chapter 1 “Theories of Fairy Tales” “Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. In this pure form, the archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche. In myths or legends, or any other more elaborate mythological material, we get at the basic patterns of the human psyche through an overlay of cultural material. But in fairy tales there is much less specific conscious cultural material, and therefore they mirror the basic patterns of the psyche more clearly.” P.1 [Can we acquit this of breathtaking textual naiveté? Has von Franz paused to consider where her sources come from and by what process they reached the present? She takes it as axiomatic, that these are direct emanations, not of the German folk soul, but of the universal human psyche. A Sinologist or an Africanist would immediately also pounce on this as Eurocentrism, and consequently blind cultural arrogance, in spades]

As we read we may find her bland acceptance of vagueness and imprecision also a little startling: “In terms of Jung’s concept, every archetype is in its essence an *unknown* [?unknowable] psychic factor, and therefore there is no possibility of translating its content into intellectual terms.” At this point the reader may wonder: well, why go on? Doesn’t this mean “game over”? A good many mystical assertions follow, including: “Every archetype is a relatively closed energetic system, the energetic stream of which runs through all aspects of the collective unconscious.” P.3.

Here’s her historical/contextual summary: “We read in Plato’s writings that old women told their children symbolic stories—*mythoi*. Even then fairy tales were connected with the education of children. In later antiquity Apuleius...built into his famous novel *The Golden Ass* a fairy tale called ‘Amor and Psyche,’ a type of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ story...fairy tales have also been found in Egyptian *papyri* and *stelai*, one of the most famous being that of the two brothers Anup (Anubis) and Bata. It runs absolutely parallel to the two brother-type tales, which one can still collect in all European countries. We have written tradition for three thousand years, and what is striking is that *the basic motifs have not changed much*. ...we have information to the effect that certain themes of tales go as far back as twenty-five thousand [twenty-five *hundred?*] years before Christ, practically unaltered.” P.4 These are sweeping claims for which very little direct evidence (or argument) is offered. The fairy tale is normally considered to be a literary extension of a wider pattern of folk tales, and to have a history not dating back significantly before the Renaissance. “Herder said that such tales contained the remnants of an old, long-buried faith expressed in symbols... Dissatisfaction with Christian

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teaching and the longing for a more vital, earthy, and instinctual wisdom began then; later we find it more explicitly among the Romanticists in Germany. It was this religious search for something which seemed lacking in official Christian teaching that first induced the famous brothers Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm to collect folktales' P.4 She actually uses the term "neopaganism", but once again offers little or no evidence for this assertion.

"...a strange unreliable, unscientific, and dishonest attitude has for a long time prevailed toward fairy tales. So I always tell students to look up the original. You can still get editions of the Grimm fairy tales in which some scenes have been omitted and those from other fairy tales inserted. The editor or translator is sometimes impertinent enough to distort the story without taking the trouble to make a footnote. They would not dare do that with the Gilgamesh epic or a text of that kind, but fairy tales seem to provide a free hunting ground where some feel free to take any liberty.

The Brothers Grimm wrote down their fairy tales literally, as told by people in their surroundings, but even they could sometimes not resist mixing a few versions, though in a tactful way.' P.5 "Theodor Benfey tried to prove that all fairy tale motifs originated in India and had migrated to Europe, while others...contended that all fairy tales were of a Babylonian origin and had then spread through Asia Minor and from there to Europe." P.6 This is a reference to the once-powerful view of cultural transmission called "Diffusionism". I have posted a brief overview to the course site, but the useful Wikipedia entry on "Trans-Cultural Diffusion" may also be consulted. Von Franz briefly summarizes Ludwig Laistner whose "hypothesis was that the basic fairy tale and folktale motifs derive from dreams." P.7 Then we hear of Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) whose idea was "that mankind has a store of *Elementargedanken* (elementary thoughts), which do not migrate but are inborn in every individual, and that those thoughts appear in different varieties in India, Babylonia, and even, for instance, in South Sea stories." P.8 and she notes commendably how much this anticipated Jung's thinking.

In her writing there is a casual acceptance of the possibility of bizarre events occurring which will startle most rationalists. She's doctrinairely narrow, too: "It is not my intention to discuss here the many current sociological and feminist theories of fairy tales, for out of ideological prejudice or resentments, they distort the basic facts".

Chapter 2: 'Fairy Tales, Myths, and Other Archetypal Stories'

Here is the main thesis again, that Fairy Tales carry one closer to the collective unconscious than myths or folk tales, because they represent a kind of geological bedrock, the essence of the whole matter, and hence are immensely powerful analytical tools. "to me the fairy tale is like the sea, and the sagas and myths are like the waves upon it; a tale rises to be a myth and sinks down again into being a fairy tale." P.26

Chapter 4: "A tale Interpreted: 'The Three Feathers'. It's about a king who has three sons and he wants to know who to pass the kingdom on to; the first two sons seem normal enough guys but the third is a seeming simpleton, 'Dummling' in the English translation. The Jungian stuff comes in somewhat thus: as it well known, the human personality is fourfold, and this is symbolized by the king and the three sons; however, the feminine

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principle is conspicuously lacking and it is this that Dummling re-instates by his openness to experience and his tolerance and kindness. As usual the reading seems wholly arbitrary to somebody who is not convinced, a priori, that Jungian psychology has the force of a law of nature. Anyway, the king sends his sons out to find a magical carpet; Dummling of course goes to the Earth Mother/Frog and gets one; the carpet represents the mystical design of the unconscious forgotten in the too rational kingly court; then the ring—this too symbolizes a lost wholeness and once again the feminine principle, suppressed at court. “On the earth, at the king’s court, a conscious attitude rules which sees the anima only as a frog. This means that in the conscious realm an attitude prevails which has a contemptuous ‘nothing but’ outlook on the phenomenon of Eros, and in those circumstances the anima appears, in the eyes of these men at the king’s court, to be a frog. We have a modern example of this in the Freudian theory in which the whole phenomenon of Eros is reduced to the biological sex function. Whatever comes up is explained in the ‘nothing but’ terms of rational theory. Freud had very little recognition of the feminine element and therefore always explained it as sex. From the Freudian standpoint even a Gothic cathedral is only a morbid surrogate for unlived sex, as is proven by the phallic towers! Viewed from such a standpoint, the sphere of the anima cannot exist. However, it is not only the Freudian attitude that does this to the anima. A moral prejudice against Eros or a repression of the Eros principle for political or other reasons also may reduce the anima to a frog or a louse or whatever other form and level she may be repressed into. Then a man’s anima becomes as undeveloped as the Eros function of a frog.” Pp.84-5 When Dummling eventually brings up a frog princess, a carrot coach is a necessary part of her transformation; much fun is had with carrot symbolism, interpreted to mean men must embrace their nocturnal sexual fantasies to achieve wholeness. “When Dummling brings together the young toad and the vehicle, then the toad turns into a beautiful woman. This would mean, practically, that if a man has the patience and courage to accept and bring to light his nocturnal sex fantasies, to look at what they carry and to let them continue, developing them and writing them down...then his whole anima will come up into the light.”P.88

Chapter 6: “The Three Feathers’ Completed”

This turns to the final test where the brides have to jump through the ring, and only Dummling’s can do it. Von Franz points out that this is a common Fairy Tale pattern: three tests, three adventures, three symbolic interludes, then a final fourth forming the coda. “As Jung himself discovered, one can find the way back to ...living symbolism... We get to it by attending to the unconscious and our dreams. By attending to one’s dreams for a long time and by really taking them into consideration, the unconscious of modern man can rebuild a symbolic life. But that presupposes that you do not interpret your dreams purely intellectually and that you really incorporated them into your life... This means no longer living merely with the reasonableness of the ego and its decisions but living with the ego embedded in a flow of psychic life which expresses itself in symbolic form and requires symbolic action.” Pp.96-7 When, as in some versions, the frog princess cries “embrace me and let us sink” and Dummling grabs her and jumps into the pond which enables her to transform into a beautiful woman, what this means is “Acceptance of the frog and the frog’s life implies a jump into the inner world, sinking down into an inner reality...” p.98 There’s a wonderfully daft Russian von Franz, Marie-Luise. *H\Y’=bHYfdfYHUH]cb’cZ: UJfmHU’Yg*. Shambhala, 1996. © Shambhala. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

version cited here in which the frog princess conceals food up her sleeves and as she dances: “she waves her right arm and out of it falls a bit of the food, which is transformed into a garden with a pillar in it. Around this a tomcat circles, then climbs up it and sings folk songs. When it comes down it tells fairy tales.” P.101 “In this way you see even more clearly that the anima creates the symbolic life, for she transforms ordinary food for the body into spiritual food through creating art and mythological tales; she restores paradise, a kind of archetypal world of fantasy. The tomcat represents a nature spirit which is the creator of folk songs and fairy tales. It also shows the close connection of the anima with man’s capacity for artistic work and with the fantasy world.” Pp.100-101 These three chapters complete her analysis of ‘The Three Feathers’.

Chapter 7: Shadow, Anima, and Animus in Fairy Tales

von Franz states that most tales are centered on the self, but “we also find in many stories motifs which remind us of Jung’s concepts of the shadow, animus, and anima.” P114 The “scientific”, objective nature of these functions is again heavily stressed: “we must again realize that we are dealing with the objective, impersonal substructure of the human psyche and not with its personal individual aspects.” P.114

This seems to involve central figures in a kind of doubling in which they split into light and dark aspects of the things they represent. To illustrate this she recounts the Scandinavian folk tale “Prince Ring” about a prince out hunting who spies a magical hind with a ring around her horns. Pursuing her he becomes separated from his companions in a fog and discovers an old woman hunched over a barrel who invites him to find the ring at the bottom of it; reaching in Ring is trapped by the old woman in the barrel, and pushed into the sea; floats around a while and comes to the land of the giants; is befriended by a couple of elderly affable giants who say they are shortly going to die and he can have anything they possess, except what is in the kitchen (the bloody chamber motif again?) What is in the kitchen is a little magic talking dog, called “Snati-Snati” and Prince Ring makes off with it. They travel on to a kingdom where the prince asks winter lodgings, and Snati helps him perform impossible tasks and win the hand of the king’s daughter. The final task involves a desperate struggle with a family of ogres who possess golden treasures. The king’s jealous minister is coming in the night to murder Ring in his bed, but the dog tells him to swap places and bites off the hand of the would-be assassin; when next day the false minister claims Ring has tried to murder him, and holds up the bloody stump as evidence, the clever dog produces the hand with the assassin’s blade still clutched in it; the minister is hanged. It ends “Ring married the princess, and on the wedding night Snati-Snati was allowed to lie at the foot of the bed. In the night he regained his true form, that of a king’s son also named Ring. His stepmother had changed him into a dog, and he could only be redeemed by sleeping at the foot of the bed of a king’s son. The hind with the golden ring, the woman on the beach, and the formidable witch-giantess were in reality different guises of his stepmother, who wished at any price to prevent his redemption.” Pp.117-8 von Franz explains this with reference to the myth of Heracles and the golden hind of Artemis “which he pursued for a year but was not allowed to kill...Artemis, the famous huntress, is often transformed into a deer; in other words, the hunter and the hunted are secretly identical.” P.118 von Franz says that in giving the hind horns, the obvious anima-figure is transformed into something

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more hermaphrodite, and, hence, shadowed. [true indeed, at least from an anatomical point of view: except for reindeer and caribou, females do not have horns] Of course, in presenting this folk tale as a psychic allegory, von Frank is being strongly anachronistic; she shows little interest in what the host society may have meant by this curious tale in historically identifiable times. One is also troubled by the routine way in which Jungian analysts collapse character boundaries, and what had seemed separate people are claimed to be but various aspects of one. The fact that the prince is called 'Ring' links him with the ring of the magic hind, and soon enough we find von Frank talking about harmonization of personality and consciousness. For some reason Ring has to find his own opposite, although there is no indication of why this should be so. The mystic wood into which he ventures is, of course, the unconscious realm. The ring is a symbol of the self, and pursuing it the hero falls into the hands of Snati-Snati's stepmother, here an ambiguous figure at once threatening and ultimately empowering. Once in the barrel and cast adrift on the sea, "One can say that Prince Ring is now under the spell of a negative mother-image which seeks to cut him off from life and to swallow him." p.121 There follow various sentiments on the subject of islands, then some interesting stuff about giants. They represent big forces of energy, apparently; the kitchen is significant, too: "Snati-Snati, who is the complementary other side of the hero [is found in the kitchen]. Historically, the kitchen was the centre of the house and was therefore the place of the house cults...the kitchen is analogous to the stomach. It is the centre of emotion..." p.124 von Franz continues, "It should be noted that the king, not the real father of Ring, is the father of the anima and that the mother is missing—a lack that connects with the fact that both Ring and the dog are under the influence of a negative mother-image. Moreover, the precious treasures that belong to this king are no longer with him, but are hoarded by a baneful giant-mother who lives with her family on a mountain." P.125 The evil minister, Rauder, is claimed to represent—for some reason--the hero's own dark emotion and impulses. We are reminded that the wood symbolizes the unconscious and so a journey into it is a descent into the unconscious. "In order to accomplish the difficult tasks, Prince Ring has to have the help of his other shadow side, the dog, which increasingly takes the imitative. The two become strongly allied, and the hero acquires the help of the instincts in the form of the positive shadow." P.128 Then the usual Jungian symbolic amplification takes place and we learn much about the implications of mountains, then, p.131 a heap of dog symbolism. I note that von Franz seems to have overlooked that the dog can only turn back into a prince reversing his stepmother's curse by sleeping at the foot of the bed of a king's son; a thing he could have done at any point in the tale. Rauder's 'animal' destructiveness is—fittingly—neutralized by an animal. Much rather banal moral reflection follows including the interesting point that evil cannot always be sublimated; sometimes it must be repressed. P.132 Even the common facts of history become vague, semi-intelligible, when forced into this strange perspective: "The Nazis put the ideal of individuation into their program, but that ideal was spoiled and made soulless by false collective interpretations." P.133 Then we get a chart showing the narrative arc, in fact a circle, of the tale, and learn that the seaside witch, and the giantess and the magic hind are all in fact secretly the same, i.e. they're aspects of the evil stepmother. At the end of all this thrashing about comes the bottom line: "This fairy tale in its entirety represents an *energetic process of transformation* within the Self, and one may compare this to the transformations that take place within an atom or its nucleus.

// To sum up...the fairy tale does not represent a personal shadow figure, but the collective shadow of the collective hero figure. [Presumably this idea is a back-formation from the initial concept of the collective unconscious; if you have got a collective unconscious then, presumably, you might need collective personalities for it to be lodged within, but this is otherwise unexplained]. It consists of an animal double which is positive, and an evildoer who is destructive. Actually, the animal double is more an undeveloped aspect of the Self.” P.136 One might wonder what sort of enrichment can be gained from such a conclusion; it tells one little or nothing about the mind, or the tale]. Then we move on to the story of “The Bewitched Princess” , and this, apparently, is about finding and incorporating or otherwise coming to some kind of positive accommodation with the Anima, during which we learn that an unreconciled or badly-integrated shadow can cause all kinds of mischief. Then there’s the story of the guy who meets a troll maiden and is invited to forswear his religion; the interpretation seems oddly blind to the theological implications. In the course of this latter, we learn about the symbolism of The Wise Old Man, then on the symbolic import of swords, fish, wheels, vampires, hearing more about the layered composite nature of the collective unconscious deposited over long periods of time: you might be Christian, but the collective unconscious is pagan. Pp.158-9 gives a passage on links between alchemy and psychology, then we return to the image of the Wise Old Man, and the symbolic implications of Wotan (see also p.176). And then the symbolic implications of milk. “On the wedding night the hero must plunge the princess three times into water until she is restored to her former self. In the Norwegian version she has to wash off her troll skin in milk. In the ancient mysteries milk played a prominent part as nourishment for the newly born initiate. In the Dionysian mountain orgies, the Maenads drank milk and honey flowing freely from the earth. Milk and honey were also the food of the reborn in early Christian baptism. In an ode of Solomon milk is extolled as a symbol of the friendliness and kindness of God. Saint Paul says that the new Christians are children drinking the milk of the new doctrine. Milk is a symbol of the beginning of divine rebirth in man. In ancient Greek sacrifices, milk was offered to the chthonic gods and to the newly dead. In these cases milk is cathartic (cf. the many German superstitions about obstructive demons bewitching milk and turning it blue, and the many prescribed precautions against them). Hence the washing of the anima in milk means the purging of the demonic elements in her as well as the purging of her link with death.” Pp.160-161 Then comes a section on “The Female Shadow” pp.163-8, which I’ve indicated should be skipped. Then on to “The Power of the Animus” where we learn that there is “an important difference between the anima and the animus. Man in his primitive capacity as hunter and warrior is accustomed to kill, and it as if the animus, being masculine, shares this propensity. One might speculate, once again, on this seemingly bold new interpretative strategy, serving only to reassert the tirades old stereotypes about masculinity and femininity current during the 1950s, see for example p.174 below] Woman, on the other hand, serves life, and the anima entangles a man In life.” Pp.169-70 So finding the anima is a positive step for a man; it seems clear, however, that on the contrary a woman should shun her animus. For further gender-stereotypical passages see p.171, bottom, and p.174

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